

McHenry dam & lake Defiance

STATE PARK



THE PARK

McHenry Dam and Lake Defiance State Park, in the northeastern corner of Illinois near McHenry, was once the home of the Sauk, Fox and Potawatomi Indians who moved from Wisconsin down the Fox River and settled in the area.

The state purchased 15 acres in 1939 and have since increased the acreage at McHenry Dam to about 95 acres. In 1971, 1,359 acres of adjacent land known as Lake Defiance was acquired and the Legislature renamed the area McHenry Dam and Lake Defiance State Park. The Lake Defiance area has not been fully developed and at the present is not open to the public.

HISTORY

When the state acquired the McHenry Dam area originally, a new dam was built to replace the old one that had suffered floodwaters damage from the Fox River and Chain O'Lakes. The dam controls the water level in the Chain O'Lakes and Fox River.

Because of the fund freeze created by World War II, major park development did not begin until 1953. Construction was first completed for the road winding into the park and the parking lot. The lawn was planted, a large plot of pine seedlings were set out in the sandy loam soil and a dense area was cleared along the Fox River below the dam, enlarging the bank fishing and picnic areas.

McHenry Dam State Park was once on both sides of the river, but in the early 1960's locks were built so that pleasure boats could get around the dam and thus travel from the Chain O'Lakes to Algonquin. The locks and locktender's buildings, for employees only, now take the area of the park which was on the west side of the river.

Because there are only about 15 useable acres in the small park, there is no parking spaces for buses. However, every available acre has been put to good recreational advantage.

FACILITIES

Picnicking: Tables are in shaded areas where park grills are provided. Drinking water is available. Rustic log cabin-style outhouses equipped with septic tanks provide toilet facilities at 2 locations. Parking is convenient.

Concession Stand: Central location in the middle of the park provides all kinds of refreshments as well as bait and rental boats for fishermen.

Playground: Children will find playground equipment scattered in shady spots.

Fishing: The Fox River offers a variety of fish including largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill, sunfish, crappie, channel catfish, bullhead, carp, northern pike, yellow perch, white bass and sucker. Motors are allowed.

There are 2 small islands where visitors may fish and picnic while completely surrounded by the river.

Boating: Because of limited parking, private canoes and boats may be brought into the park by car top only. Boat rentals are available and there is a 15 h.p. motor limit on them. Camping, swimming or wading is prohibited.

Lake Defiance: Currently NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, this scenic area is being carefully developed for future use. Lake Defiance is a natural glacial lake covering 47 acres and is excellent for warm water fish species. Just southeast of the lake is an area of low wetlands, which are very valuable as spawning grounds for the Northern Pike in the lake.

As a Leatherleaf Bog of excellent quality, perhaps one of the best in the state, the area lends itself very well to interpretation from a distance or from the edge. The Bog is naturally protected by a moat which surrounds it.

Several heavily wooded areas provide an aesthetic landscape as well as a living environment for many of the wildlife animals. Major tree species are oak, hickory, cherry, hawthorn, hackberry, ash, willow and some pines. Many songbirds mingle with the cottontail rabbit, ring-necked pheasant, fox squirrel, raccoon, mink, marsh hawk, mourning dove, owl, wild duck and coot.

Please: This area is for all to enjoy so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest available trash container. No flowers, plants, shrubs or trees may be removed or damaged. If you need help or have a question, contact the Ranger.

The park is open from 6 a.m. daily from May to October. Beer and intoxicating drinks are prohibited.



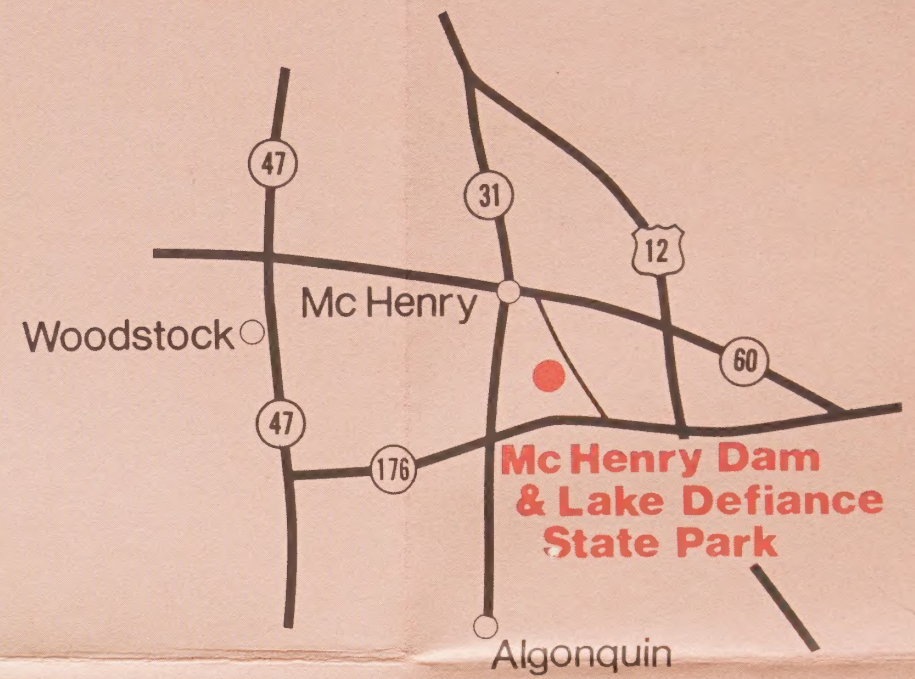
FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state parks and memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact Ranger, 914 S. River Road, McHenry, Illinois 60050, phone 815/385-1624. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Division, State Office Building, Springfield 62706.



Park Maps



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